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2019

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Saarinen , R 2019 , ' Mutual Recognition in Theology and Modern Society ' , Paper presented at European Academy of Religion , Bologna , Italy , 05/03/2018 - 08/03/2018 pp. 87-116 .

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/308820>

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## Mutual Recognition in Theology and Modern Society

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**Abstract:** Since the 1990s, social scientists and philosophers argue that a multicultural, democratic society is characterized by two complementary virtues, namely, toleration and mutual recognition. While toleration provides the individual with necessary freedom rights, mutual recognition means that citizens are approved, respected and esteemed by others, feeling that they belong to the same community. The virtue of recognition (Anerkennung, reconnaissance) is normally considered to be a 19th-century invention of Hegel. However, both the terminology and the phenomenon of mutual recognition have long Christian roots. The Latin verbs *agnoscere* and *recognoscere* are abundantly used in theology to depict a new appreciation of personal others. Thomas Aquinas and Calvin employ the concept to describe a normative acknowledgement. Schleiermacher outlines justification by faith as a divine act of recognition. Vatican II and the ecumenical movement understand recognition as a spiritual event taking place between members of different faith communities. The paper argues, in keeping with my book *Recognition and Religion* (Oxford 2016), that the modern concept of mutual recognition has a long prehistory in Christian theology.

### 1. Current Politics of Recognition

In his seminal essay of 1992, originally titled “Multiculturalism and Politics of Recognition”, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor launches the concept of mutual recognition into contemporary democratic decision-making. While Taylor considers the idea of toleration to be extremely important, he also claims that toleration is not alone sufficient to guarantee the well-being of minorities in democratic societies. In addition, we need special acts of recognizing minorities, and the minorities are supposed to the society that recognize them. Through such mutual recognition, the minorities can cherish their cultural difference and at the same time become equal societal partners.<sup>1</sup>

Such acts of recognizing others can, at least so says the theory, prevent the segregation of sub-cultures in multicultural societies. Acts of mutual recognition are expected to prevent the emergence of alternative societies taking place within the macrostructure of democracy. In mutual recognition, majorities identify minorities and affirm their particular identity and right to pursue goal relevant to their own flourishing. As a return gift, the minorities affirm the overall rule of law in democratic state and commit themselves in cooperation with the society at large.<sup>2</sup>

After Taylor’s essay, such politics of recognition, or positive identity politics, has been extensively discussed and debated in social sciences. According to another leading theorist, the German philosopher Axel Honneth, people seek recognition in three distinct and related spheres of life. In the private sphere, people seek loving recognition. As citizens of

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Charles, ‘The Politics of Recognition’, in his *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1995), 225-256.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Thompson, Simon, *The Political Theory of Recognition: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

democratic state, people seek respect and legal recognition in terms of equality. In their professional life, people seek esteem that values their individual skills, virtues and life goals.<sup>3</sup>

According to Honneth, such broad concept of threefold recognition stems from young Hegel's philosophy of *Anerkennung*. From Fichte and Hegel, the concept of recognition has found its way to diplomatic and political theory already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is only the late modern identity politics in which the usefulness of mutual recognition as psychological, social and political concept can be fruitfully understood.<sup>4</sup>

Both Taylor and Honneth consider mutual recognition to be a secular virtue of the Enlightenment and the Hegelian modernity. Recognition is in this manner a twin sister of toleration. While toleration provides us with freedom rights, recognition can produce minority rights and social cohesion. Thus the twin sisters contribute to the well-being of late modern secular democratic society.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, Taylor and Honneth also consider that the strive for mutual recognition is a basic psychological and anthropological fact which is due to child development and occupies human beings without respect to particular cultural surroundings. Everyone needs love, respect and esteem everywhere, not just in modern European society or in late modern identity politics. In my view, there is some tension between the alleged emergence of recognition in secular modernity on the one hand and the claim of a universal need for recognition on the other. If people have always strived after recognition, how can it be that this has been realized only since Hegel?

Some philosophers have also asked about the longer history of recognition discourses. Paul Ricoeur considers that the concept has some roots in the idea of *anagnorisis*, identification or knowing again, *wiedererkennen*, a significant theme in Aristotle's poetics. However, Ricoeur also considers that the idea of *Anerkennung*, meaning both identification and normative evaluation, only stems from Hegel. Ricoeur and his colleague Marcel Henaff add to this that such recognition need not only emerge from violent struggle. It can also be a gesture of hospitality and peaceful gift exchange.<sup>6</sup>

Recently, Piero Boitani has published an extensive intellectual history of Aristotelian *anagnorisis*. Boitani pays attention to the Latin terms *agnosco*, *agnitio*, which carry the Aristotelian idea in Western literature. It needs to be added, however, that the poetic idea of re-identification is different from the normative recognition outlined by Honneth and Taylor.<sup>7</sup>

This new discussion in social theory has also been received in theology. In contemporary German Catholicism, Veronika Hoffmann has investigated its theological potential, in particular when recognition is considered as peaceful gift exchange, *eine Gabe der*

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<sup>3</sup> Honneth, Axel, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Honneth, Axel, *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), and his *Anerkennung: eine europäische Ideengeschichte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Forst, Rainer, *Toleranz im Konflikt. Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Ricoeur, Paul, *The Course of Recognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Boitani, Piero, *Riconoscere è un dio* (Torino: Einaudi, 2014).

Anerkennung. In American theology, Timothy Lim has recently published an ecclesiological elaboration of the Hegelian variant.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Recognition and Religion: Ancient Roots

At the University of Helsinki, we conduct a research project titled “Reason and Religious Recognition”. Our team includes theologians, historians and philosophers. We take the theory of Honneth and Taylor seriously and collaborate with the German philosophers and theologians working at the universities of Frankfurt and Münster. At the same time, we claim that the history of normative recognition does not start with Hegel but has a long prehistory in Christian theology. Because of this prehistory, recognition is a much less secular concept than toleration, and it can be fruitfully applied to ecumenism and other issues of Christian identity. Because this application is genuinely Christian, it does not simply follow Hegel or other modern theories but develops its own theological criteria. In my paper of today, I will elucidate this claim of long Christian history of recognition with some examples.

Let me begin with mentioning three recent publications. A thematic issue of the journal *Open Theology* (2/2016) gathers the papers given at the American Academy of Religion’s session on recognition in 2015. The proceedings of Societas Oecumenica, the European university ecumenists’ recent conference in Helsinki 2016, is titled *Recognition and Reception in Ecumenical Relations*.<sup>9</sup> We were very happy to host professor Marcel Hénaff in our conference and are proud that he contributed to this volume.

My following historical orientations are based on a third publication, namely, my own recent monograph *Recognition and Religion*. In this book I present my arguments for the claim that recognition is an ancient Christian concept which has influenced the modern philosophy but which also has its own, distinct intellectual profile.<sup>10</sup> Like Piero Boitani, I often focus on the Latin terms *agnosco*, *agnitio*, which are since medieval times employed as synonymous with *recognosco*, *recognitio*, and which are not only translating Aristotelian re-identification but are also distinct legal and religious terms.

One point of departure in my own history is the Latin Bible. In the Vulgate, the Greek *ginosko* is normally translated with *cognosco*. The almost synonymous verb *epiginosko* is, however, often translated with *agnosco*. *Agnosco* and *agnitio* are in the Roman law employed to highlight some performative legal transactions, like adoption (*agnitio filii*) and approval of testament (*hereditatem agnoscere*). Due to such performative uses, some passages in the Vulgate give the impression of normative approval due to identification, a meaning that is very close to the idea of recognition.<sup>11</sup>

Influential passages of this kind include 1. Tim 2:4, reading “God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (*epignosis tes aletheias*, *agnitio veritatis*). In Tit 1:1 Paul calls himself a servant of God for the sake of the knowledge of the truth (again

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<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann, Veronika, *Skizzen zu einer Theologie der Gabe* (Freiburg: Herder, 2013). Lim, Timothy A., *Ecclesial Recognition with Hegelian Philosophy, Social Psychology and Continental Political Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Heller, Dagmar & Hietamäki, Minna (eds.), *Just Do It?! Recognition and Reception in Ecumenical Relations* (Leipzig: Evang. Verlag, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Saarinen, Risto, *Recognition and Religion: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Saarinen, 42-48.

epignosis tes aletheias, agnitio veritatis). In such passages, the term agnitio does not only mean observation but also approval and affirmation, a performative and normative move which semantically resembles the act of adoption in Roman law.<sup>12</sup>

The phrase agnitio veritatis is used prominently in an early Christian novel, the so-called pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, of which the Latin translation is extant and has been used through the medieval and early modern period. From the surviving Greek fragments we know that the word recognitio translates the Greek term anagnorismos. Recognitio and agnitio are also used synonymously. The somewhat clumsy plot of this novel reveals a familiarity with the Aristotelian poetic view of re-identification. The novel tells the story of Clement, who meets apostles and his own family members, discovering their identities in the context of his own life story. This horizontal recognition is close to Aristotle's anagnorisis.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this, and most importantly, the novel explains how Clement becomes true Christian in a vertical encounter with the True Prophet, or God in Jesus Christ. This vertical encounter is repeatedly described with the Pauline phrase agnitio veritatis. Such agnitio is not very philosophical but simple knowledge to modest people:

For the knowledge of thing which is imparted by the true Prophet is simple and plain and brief ... to modest and simple minds, when they see things come to pass which have been foretold, it is enough, and more than enough, that they may receive most certain knowledge from most certain prescience and for the rest may be at peace, having received most certain knowledge of the truth (agnitio veritatis, *Recognitiones* 8, 61:2)

*Recognitiones* describes the emergence of such knowledge in terms of struggle, in which the mind is illuminated:

our mind is subject to errors ... But the mind has it in its own nature to oppose and fight against these, when the knowledge of truth (agnitio veritatis) shines upon it, by which knowledge is imparted fear of judgement to come, which is a fit governor of the mind, and which can recall it from the precipices of lusts (*Recognitiones* 9, 31:2).

In spite of its clumsiness, the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* is a remarkable work since it unites two ancient traditions recognition, that is, the Aristotelian poetic re-identification on the one hand and the legal and Pauline language of vertical agnitio on the other. We find repercussions of this language in Augustine and other Latin patristic sources. Augustine favors the phrases agnitio Dei and agnitio Christi but in some cases he can also employ agnitio veritatis.<sup>14</sup>

We can thus say that already in early Christianity and Latin patristic era an idea of vertical recognition is available, an idea that employs views of Aristotelian poetics and Roman law. However, this idea of vertical recognition has its own distinctive content in the act of conversion in which the mind turns towards the higher truth of revelation, acknowledging its priority vis-à-vis earthly realities. We may label this first Christian idea of recognition as *conversion narrative*, as the agnitio Christi or agnitio veritatis often means performative metanoia or conversion.

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<sup>12</sup> Saarinen, 46-48.

<sup>13</sup> Saarinen, 48-54. Clement (pseudo), *Recognitiones, Die Pseudoklementinen 2. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 51* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1965). The following translations are from *Clementina, The Ante-Nicene Fathers 8* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

<sup>14</sup> Saarinen, 54-58.

### 3. Medieval and Early Modern Recognition Discourses

In medieval theology, we can see a new vocabulary of mutual recognition emerging. This new vocabulary employs features of feudal law, that is, regulations concerning the relationship between lord and servant. In addition to lord and servant, the loving relationship between bridegroom and bride becomes important. Allegorically, both the lord and the bridegroom can represent God or Christ, while the servant and the bride represent human beings or the faithful. Typically, the lord or the bridegroom in this relationship commends the servant or the bride and gives her a gift, a beneficium. The servant or the bride responds to this with an act of recognizing the lord or the groom. In this description, the Latin verbs *recognosco* and *agnosco* are employed synonymously. They do not signify an act of re-identification but rather an act of normative approval in the mutual bond.

Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* employ this vocabulary in an abundant fashion and can be considered as a keynote text regarding the medieval view of theological recognition.<sup>15</sup> I will now, however, resist the temptation to dwell on this wonderful work and proceed straightly to Thomas Aquinas. In Aquinas, we encounter the feudal terminology but also some views which sound astonishingly modern. For instance, Thomas explains the encounter between Mary Magdalene and risen Christ as follows. First Mary does not identify the other as Christ, but when Christ says to her "Mary", she recognised (*agnovit*) Christ. In saying "Mary", Christ is asking her "to recognize him who recognizes you" (*recognosce eum a quo recognosceris*).<sup>16</sup> Significantly, Thomas speaks here of mutual recognition. While the meaning of re-identification is here relevant, the passage probably also includes the idea of mutual affirmation and showing respect.

Also when Aquinas is employing feudal terminology his conclusions sound surprisingly modern. He considers the people should react to divine gifts with a proper act taking place *in recognitionem divini beneficii*. He adds that such benefit creates a "debt of recognition" (*debitum recognitionis*).<sup>17</sup>

When it is asked whether we should pay honour to those in positions of dignity, Thomas answers as follows:

a person in a position of dignity is an object of twofold consideration; first, in so far as he obtains excellence of position, together with a certain power over subjects; secondly, as regards the exercise of his government. In respect of his excellence there is due to him honor, which is the recognition (*recognitio*) of some kind of excellence; and in respect of the exercise of his government, there is due to him worship, consisting in rendering him service ... repaying him ... for the benefits we received<sup>18</sup>

Here, in a seemingly modern fashion, recognition concerns the status of a person, whereas the so-called worship concerns the achievements and merits. This sounds somewhat similar to Axel Honneth's distinction between respect and esteem as two basic modes of recognition. The impression is strengthened when Thomas says in this context that we owe other person a twofold debt. The so-called legal debt concerns officeholders as pertaining to their status. The

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<sup>15</sup> Saarinen, 63-69.

<sup>16</sup> Saarinen, 69-73. Thomas, *Super Ev. Ioh.* 20 lec 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Summa theol.* II/2 q86 a4 resp, ad1.

<sup>18</sup> *Summa theol.* II/2 q102 a2 resp.

so-called moral debt concerns persons without regard to the hierarchies existing between us and them.<sup>19</sup>

While recognition in Thomas Aquinas pertains to normative status and is only very thinly connected to re-identification or memory, it would be misleading to interpret it in a very modern fashion. Thomas assumes the background of feudal law and the exchange between the lord's benefits and the servant's recognition. It is nevertheless striking how mutual this relationship is and that there is a distinction between legal, obligatory respect and more voluntary esteem based on merits and performance. One also needs to remember that the feudal terminology is deeply relational. We are lords and servants, husbands and wives in a network of mutual dependence. While this relationality is different from late modern constructionism, they both share the idea that our identities are deeply heteronomous. It is this heteronomy and mutual dependence which makes Thomas Aquinas look modern in many ways.

When we come to the Reformation, the ideas of relational constitution and heteronomy continue to be influential, although the feudal law no longer serves as the conceptual background. Jean Calvin employs recognition terminology abundantly in his *Institutio*, radicalizing many medieval ideas. Calvin teaches that all humans express a sense of natural heteronomy and dependance on some higher being. All people are "compelled to acknowledge (agnosco) some God".<sup>20</sup>

This natural heteronomy means not only servanthood but our complete belonging to God, as Calvin formulates in his Puritan manner:

We are not our own: let neither our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds ... We are not our own; in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's; let us therefore live for him and die for him.<sup>21</sup>

Like Thomas Aquinas, Calvin employs recognition terminology in the sense of normative affirmation. For him, however, the event of recognition consists of tribulations and radical self-denial, through which God's true being can be known. I quote:

in the very harshness of tribulations we must recognize (recognosco) the kindness and generosity of our Father towards us ... When we acknowledge (agnoscimus) the Father's rod, is it not our duty to show ourselves obedient and teachable children?<sup>22</sup>

Like the author of Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, Calvin teaches that we can only recognize God when our confused emotions are set aside, asking rhetorically as follows:

Where is your recognition of God (recognitio Dei) if your flesh boiling over with excessive abundance into vile lusts infects the mind with its impurity ... Where is our recognition of God (recognitio Dei) if our minds be fixed upon the the splendour of our apparel? For many so enslave all their senses to delights that the mind lies overwhelmed.<sup>23</sup>

For Calvin, the right knowledge and recognition of God is connected with truthful self-knowledge. Therefore, one must first recognize and confess one's own sinfulness and then

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<sup>19</sup> *Summa theol.* II/2 q102 a2 ad2.

<sup>20</sup> *Inst.* 1, 4, 2. Saarinen, 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Inst.* 3, 7, 1. Translations from Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1-2*, ed. J. T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> *Inst.* 3, 8, 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Inst.* 3, 10, 3.

look toward God. When this process is successfully completed, Christians can become saints who have true knowledge of God and true self-knowledge. In such state of clarity, the saints can understand their humanity “without comparison with others, while they recognize themselves before God” (*dum se coram Deo recognoscunt*).<sup>24</sup> In this manner, the absolute dependance on God finally leads to the relative autonomy in which one does not need to compare oneself with other humans.

In this quote, Calvin uses the reflexive form, *se recognoscere*, to recognize oneself. The reflexive form is used prominently in many texts of the Renaissance and the Reformation. It also appears in Augustine. Paul Ricoeur has paid attention to the phenomenon of recognizing oneself. It is one aspect of the classical philosophical theme of knowing oneself. Ricoeur explains the phenomenon with the help of anamnesis, recollection. We recognize ourselves with the help of memory.<sup>25</sup> When I wake up in the morning, I re-identify my mind and body with the person who is in my memory from yesterday. When this happens every morning, I have an identity which is given from the memory as the recognition of myself.

This explanation is fitting when Augustine is concerned. In the Renaissance and the Reformation, however, the reflexive form *se recognoscere* is employed in a different meaning. The Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino teaches in his *De amore* that I can become aware of our own deeper self when I fall in love and when I see my beloved. For in the face of my beloved I can recognize my own deeper self.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the relational love between myself and my beloved gives me access to my deeper self. Ficino calls this relational access an act of *se recognoscere*.

Basically, Calvin employs the same figure of thought when he declares that the faithful can recognize themselves only when they let themselves be known and defined by God. In this relationship before God, *coram Deo*, the Christian can recognize oneself. In this manner, the event of recognizing themselves is not an act of memory but an act of interpersonal encounter. We can see this same figure, recognizing oneself through the other, also in Martin Luther's monastic struggles with the understanding of God's righteousness. Luther employs the terms *agnosco*, *agnitio* abundantly. He teaches that many different kinds of human acknowledgement are necessary in order that humans can renounce their own priorities and give God priority. Only after such renunciation God can verify and justify the sinful human person, giving him or her the deeper identity.<sup>27</sup>

The period from Bernard of Clairvaux to early modernity constitutes the second paradigm of Christian theology of recognition. While the first paradigm was labeled as conversion narrative, this second paradigm is much more relational and takes place in deep mutuality between the partners. As the divine commendation and benefit often occurs in terms of promise, it can be aptly summarized with this term. As the human response and new human condition leads to self-preservation, sometimes as feudal bond, sometimes as justification and salvation, sometimes as loving relationship, I summarize this response as self-preservation. Therefore, the second paradigm of Christian recognition expresses *the promise of self-preservation*.

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<sup>24</sup> *Inst.* 3, 14, 18. Saarinen, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Ricoeur, 69-148.

<sup>26</sup> Saarinen, 79-87. Ficino, Marsilio, *Commentarium in convivium Platonis, De amore*, ed. P. Laurens (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002), esp. II, 8 and VI, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Saarinen, 87-98.



#### 4. Religious Recognition in Modernity

The first and the second paradigms, conversion narrative and promise of self-preservation, take place predominantly in Latin theological writings. When we come to the modernity, we must consider the vernacular terminologies in some detail. English terminology is not very complex, as the verbs acknowledge and recognize carry over the Latin meanings of *agnosco* and *recognosco*. Regarding French terminology, Paul Ricoeur's historical observations are problematic. He considers that the French verb *reconnaître* starts to be used in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and receives its normative meaning in Rousseau.<sup>28</sup>

However, the French edition of Calvin's *Institutio*, published in 1560, already uses *reconnaître* and *reconnaissance* abundantly, carrying over the normative meaning available in Latin.<sup>29</sup> In my view, both the English and the French terminology display a remarkable continuation with the Latin traditions.

The German terminology is more complicated, as the words *anerkennen*, *Anerkennung* only start to be employed during the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Contemporary social philosophy normally assumes that Hegel is the first thinker to give these terms an elaborated philosophical meaning.

However, if we look at German theological texts, we find a tradition which is older than Hegel. This tradition interacts with Hegelian philosophy but remains also an independent current of thought. The first German theologian to use *Anerkennung* in a prominent fashion is the Berlin Neologist Johann Joachim Spalding. In his popular bestseller, *Religion, eine Angelegenheit des Menschen*, 1796, *Anerkennung* is a key notion.<sup>30</sup>

In this book Spalding develops a philosophy of religion which can escape some of the criticism of theological thought presented by Immanuel Kant. Spalding admits that after Kant we may not present dogmatic or confessional religion in a scientific fashion. He argues, however, that an enlightened person realizes that he or she lives with the help of two fundamental instincts or feelings, namely, desire for moral goodness and desire for personal happiness. In order to live a reasonable life in which these two feelings exist in harmony, such person must in some way affirm a world-ruler (*Weltregierer*) who guarantees the existence of the goals of goodness and happiness. This act of primary affirmation Spalding calls *Anerkennung*. It is less than confession but more than a Kantian theoretical and practical knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

In keeping with this basic idea, Spalding defines religion as "recognition (*Anerkennung*) of the most perfect world-ruler in his relationship to us". This means that the act of recognition does not produce objective knowledge but an affirmation with the first-person stance, a "relationship to us". With the help of this primary *Anerkennung*, the enlightened person can believe in the goodness and happiness that is available for him.<sup>32</sup> Spalding thus produces a derivation of many basic issues from the primary act of *Anerkennung* as follows:

The working out of harmony between goodness and happiness is only possible through the recognition (*Anerkennung*) of a being that has intentionally equipped the

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<sup>28</sup> Ricoeur, 1-22, 207-208.

<sup>29</sup> Saarinen, 98-110.

<sup>30</sup> Saarinen, 125-136. Spalding, Johann Joachim, *Religion, eine Angelegenheit des Menschen*. Kritische Ausgabe 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Spalding, 24. Translations mine.

<sup>32</sup> Spalding, 24.

soul with both basic feelings, so that neither of them is there in vain, without expected fulfilment. ... With this conviction, the virtuous person has much more courage and his prevailing is confirmed. He can then say firmly and confidently: I will be true to my conscience, since through it alone I will in the end obtain everything that is good for me. He who made me will take care of that. But also for this reason I will honour the religion that justifies my saying this.<sup>33</sup>

When Spalding considers the act of *Anerkennung* to be the basic affirmation of religious world-view, he performs a move which is typical of most modern theories of recognition. In this modern view, the act of recognition produces a status change of the object. In Spalding, this status change is not philosophical or political, but rather an existential first-person status change. The primary act of recognition affirms the importance of the object for me personally. I call this modern view and third religious paradigm *existential status change*.

Spalding is nevertheless traditional in the sense that, for him, it is the human being who recognizes the importance of God. This usage is common in both the first paradigm of conversion and the second paradigm of self-preservation. Shortly after Spalding, Friedrich Schleiermacher reverses the order of status change. In his prominent dogmatics, *Der christliche Glaube*, Schleiermacher defines the act of justification as follows:

That God justifies the person who converts entails that God forgives his sins and recognizes (*anerkennt*) him as a child of God. This change of a person's relationship to God occurs only when he has a true faith in the redeemer.<sup>34</sup>

Schleiermacher here conceives *Anerkennung* as a downward act, through which God justifies the human being. In his commentary of this statement, Schleiermacher reflects on the concept of childhood of God, connecting this theme with adoption and Roman law. Schleiermacher's use of the concept of recognition is not accidental. He connects the downward *Anerkennung* with the ancient legal model of adoption. Like in Spalding, however, it is the status change of the object which is distinctive in the act of religious recognition.

The theological view of *Anerkennung* continues from Spalding and Schleiermacher to the dialectical theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We find it prominently represented in Rudolf Bultmann's entries to Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments*. Both in the entry *ginosko*, to know, and *pisteuo*, to believe, Bultmann considers that in the biblical vocabulary the act of knowing entails the act of affirming or recognizing (*anerkennen*). Bultmann says, for instance, that a human understanding of divine will is "primarily recognition, an obedient or thankful submission to what is known". Christian knowledge is "an obedient and grateful recognition (*Anerkennung*) of the deeds and demands of God". Gnosis in New Testament does not mean theoretical information but a "recognition of God's new plan of salvation". The Greek term *epignosis* in particular is "almost a technical term for the decisive knowledge of God which is implied in the conversion to the Christian faith".<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Spalding, 32-33.

<sup>34</sup> Schleiermacher, F. D. E., *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche in Zusammenhange dargestellt*. 2nd ed. (1830/31) Kritische Gesamtausgabe 1/13 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), §109.

<sup>35</sup> Bultmann, Rudolf, 'ginosko' and 'pisteuo' in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* ed. G. Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933, 1959), 1:688-719 and 6:174-230. Saarinen, 158-161.

It is fascinating that in these words of Bultmann we hear our first paradigm, the idea that *agnitio veritatis* is basically a conversion. At the same time, we also hear the modern paradigm of existential status change. A Christian does not receive religious information but he or she makes a first-person leap of faith, a primary recognition which makes everything else meaningful.

Karl Barth likewise makes use of such primary and existential understanding of recognition. In his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Barth opposes the idea that religious conviction proceeds from knowledge to assent. In Barth's view, such order does not pay proper attention to the primacy of assent in religious faith. Like Spalding, Barth teaches that we must first make an act of recognition, *Anerkennen*, in order to make sense of religion. In his view, faith consists of *Anerkennen*, *Erkennen* and *Bekennen*, that is recognition, knowing and confessing, which follow in this order. Barth explains:

Christian faith is an acknowledgement, *Anerkennen*. In our description ... this must come first ... Knowing, *Erkennen*, is certainly included in the acknowledgement, but it can only follow it. Acknowledgement is a cognition which is obedient and compliant, which yields and subordinates itself. This obedience and compliance is not an incidental and subsequent characteristic of the act of faith, but primary, basic, and decisive. It is not preceded by any other kind of knowledge, either knowing or confessing.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, Barth claims, like Bultmann and Spalding, that the act of recognition must come first in Christian faith. Knowing and confessing make sense after the primary act of *Anerkennen*, recognition. We see here again our third paradigm of theological recognition at work. An existential status change of the object must come first in order that intellectual content can follow. This is in a way the classical model of *fides quaerens intellectum*. Let it be mentioned that some contemporary philosophical models are fairly close to the model of Barth. Axel Honneth, for instance, claims programmatically that recognition precedes cognition. This is the case already in infant psychology, because the infant needs an attachment and an object relation before it can learn and develop cognitively.<sup>37</sup> While the modern theological model of Bultmann and Barth should not be confused with philosophical theories of recognition, they both affirm an idea of existential attachment which is connected with the status change of the object.

In contemporary German theology, Eberhard Jüngel is a prominent representative of such thinking. In his book on justification by faith, published first in 1998, Jüngel writes that "it is essential for people to be recognized. Their personhood depends on it. As human beings, we demand recognition for ourselves. The wish for justification has its source in this basic human need for recognition."<sup>38</sup>

To summarize my brief outline of the history of religious recognition in Christianity. Recognition is an old topic which is discussed more or less continuously from Early Christianity to today. Three basic paradigms can be detected. The *oldest paradigm*, conversion narrative, focuses on the change of the recognizing subject. The *second paradigm*,

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<sup>36</sup> Barth, Karl, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (München/Zürich: TVZ, 1932-1967) IV/1, 847-48 (G. Bromiley's translation slightly modified).

<sup>37</sup> Honneth, Axel, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Jüngel, Eberhard, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 7-8.

dominant from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, emphasizes mutual recognition in a relational setting. In this setting, God makes promises and the human being enters a bond which leads to self-preservation. Also the idea of self-recognition through others plays a role in this second paradigm. The *third paradigm* expresses a status change of the recognized object. In religion, however, this is not a political or diplomatic act, but a primary existential attachment which opens the recognizer to a new understanding of religion and theology.

I have emphasized that even the third paradigm is older than Hegel's thought, and that Hegel's thinking may be indebted to the second paradigm. The main finding is, however, that recognition is a classical topic of Christian theology. We should also be aware that current theories of recognition also affirm the possibility that recognition does not only pertain to the status of its object. It is rather the case that all parties change in the event of recognition. This is particularly visible in those theories in which recognition is understood in terms of gift exchange. But also the Hegelian theories of struggle can make the point that this struggle changes everyone, both the recognizer and the recognizee. Christian theology has been aware of all these conceptual possibilities. Therefore one can say that recognition is a less secular idea than toleration and that the so-called politics of recognition has deep Christian roots.

Having said this, it is important to add that religious recognition cannot provide all the answers elaborated in social theory. Taylor and Honneth aim at clarifying how democratic society can affirm both difference and equality at the same time. In democracy, we can affirm both the lasting difference or otherness and the fundamental and practical equality of every member of society. The tradition of religious recognition outlined above makes visible some important aspects of otherness. Bridegroom and bride, lord and servant, God and God's people recognize one another in terms of lasting otherness. Christian theology can consider issues of positive otherness. On the other hand, such relationships are hierarchical and do not propagate equality in the manner of social theory. There is, however, one field of theology in which horizontal forms of mutual recognition among equals are being elaborated. This is ecumenism, the last section of my presentation.

## 5. Recognition in Ecumenical Theology: Difference and Equality

The concept of mutual recognition among equals was already employed in the early ecumenical movement before the Second World War. These early discussions did not, however, employ a theological concept of recognition. They rather borrowed the diplomatic concept from international politics. In this manner, a 1937 Faith and Order text formulates as follows:

To speak of mutual recognition is to enter the area of inter-church relationships. As in the case of civil governments, 'recognition' is a condition of further relationships, so it is with the Churches. Mutual recognition may be partial or complete. It does not necessarily involve any co-operative action or Corporate Union...<sup>39</sup>

After the Second World War we notice an elaboration of the idea of mutual recognition in the ecumenical movement. According to the so-called "Toronto Declaration" of 1950, the churches need not recognize one another when they are members of the World Council of

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<sup>39</sup> 'Meanings of Unity, The'. Report No 1 Prepared by the Commission on the Church's Unity in Life and Worship for the World Conference on Faith and Order, Edinburgh, 1937. *Faith and Order Pamphlet* 82 (1937), 18.

Church. However, they must all recognize Jesus “Christ as the Divine Head of the Body”. In addition, they need “to recognize in other churches elements of the true Church”. Such formulations give the impression of a mediated recognition, in which a third party, Jesus Christ, unites the partners who cannot recognize one another directly. This is already a variant of theological recognition.<sup>40</sup>

The texts of the Second Vatican Council mark a new awareness and deepening of the idea of ecumenical recognition. The council texts employ the old Latin notion of *agnosco* often and in significant places. *Lumen Gentium* (9) considers that God gathers God’s people among those who “acknowledge him in truth”. *Nostra aetate* (2) speaks of the “acknowledgement of a supreme deity or even of a Father” by the adherents of other religions.

The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* (3-4) considers that Catholics must gladly acknowledge (*agnosco*) and esteem the truly Christian endowments which derive from our common heritage ... It is right and salutary to recognize (*agnosco*) the riches of Christ and the virtuous deeds in the lives of others’. While the Catholic Church does not recognize other churches as churches in the full sense of the term, it does recognize certain spiritual treasures in them.

In the Eastern churches in particular, Christ can be ‘acknowledged (*agnosceretur*) as being truly and properly Son of God and son of man, according to the Scriptures’. Catholics ‘must recognize (*agnoscendum est*) the admirable way in which they [the theological traditions of the eastern church] have their roots in holy scripture’. Eastern theological language is considered ‘as mutually complementary rather than conflicting’ with Catholic statements. (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 16-17). In this sense, some horizontal recognition takes place between different ecclesiastical traditions. It can thus be argued that the Council develops a certain politics of multiculturalism and a recognition of otherness.

This vocabulary of Vatican II was further developed by Heinrich Fries, Walter Kasper and Joseph Ratzinger in their ecumenical writings during the 1970s. Kasper and Ratzinger emphasize that the recognition of other parties does not proceed in a diplomatic manner but it remains a spiritual and theological act which assumes a new orientation of the one who recognizes. Heinrich Fries writes that, on the one hand, recognition of others expresses a legitimate theological plurality. On the other hand, a relationship of mutual recognition also assumes a common ground (*ein Gemeinsames*), which can bridge the differences.<sup>41</sup> This position of Fries resembles the ecumenical method of differentiating consensus, as employed in the Lutheran – Roman Catholic document “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (1999).<sup>42</sup>

In some sense, Vatican II and theological discussions derived from it revive the old Christian way of speaking about *agnitio*, a recognition that also means *metanoia* and even conversion. When Ratzinger and Kasper emphasize that recognition is a spiritual act, they are also reviving the first and second paradigm in which recognition is much more than a status change of its object. In the first and second paradigm, the change of the recognizing subject remains in the focus of recognition. Therefore, theological recognition is different from

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<sup>40</sup> *Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, ed. Lukas Vischer (St. Louis: Bethany, 1963), 171-73. Saarinen, 175.

<sup>41</sup> See Saarinen, 176-180.

<sup>42</sup> For this method, see Birmelé, André & Thönissen, Wolfgang (eds.), *Auf dem Weg zur Gemeinschaft* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2018).

political and diplomatic processes of recognition. Conversion, or at least spiritual openness, is needed for the theological recognition of the other.

At the same time, such spiritual emphasis does not mean subjectivism. Fries emphasizes the importance of common ground with good reason. In addition to these Catholic considerations, I think that the third paradigm which emphasizes the existential primacy of the subject does not aim at subjectivism as such. The modern Protestant paradigm which leads from Spalding and Schleiermacher to Bultmann and Barth wants to highlight the specific nature of theological acts of recognition.

In a modern world that separates religion from naturalism and science, theologians need to emphasize the importance of first-person stance and existential commitment. When we emphasize this, we do not aim at subjectivism but rather to an opening through which the intellectual resources of theology can be visible. This means *fides quaerens intellectum* rather than separatist fideism. Given this, the third paradigm, the existential status change of the object, is not very far from Kasper's and Ratzinger's ideas of spiritual recognition and interpersonal encounter.

In sum, theologians discussed the issues of recognition in a profound manner already in the 1970s. In social theory, we find similar discussions during the 1990s. Theologians were, for once, ahead of their times. The ecumenical documents which emerged from this trend often employ explicitly the language of mutual acknowledgement and recognition. They do not compare ecumenical recognition with political or diplomatic acts, but affirm the specific theological nature of ecumenical encounter.

A good example of this kind is the so-called "Porvoo Declaration", a full communion agreement between the Church of England and the North European Lutheran churches. This document repeatedly uses the formula "we acknowledge" to lay out the mutual understanding reached in matters of faith. While the agreement assumes equality and lasting difference between the partner churches, it also declares their readiness to be open for changes.<sup>43</sup> Although the drafters of Porvoo declaration may not have been aware of the long history of theological recognition, they have practiced and continued it in their ecumenical formulations. I hope that the increasing awareness of the history of theological recognition paradigms may help contemporary Christians and their churches in encountering other churches and other religions in terms of genuine equality and sincere difference.

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<sup>43</sup> See Saarinen, 180-182.